



Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Washington's organic program earns USDA accreditation

OLYMPIA – The Washington State Department of Agriculture is among the first state agencies to be accredited to certify organic production and handling operations to comply with National Organic Program standards. The accreditation, announced April 29 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, ensures a nearly seamless transition for Washington's organic industry.

The federal standards are very similar to the state standards Washington has developed over the past 17 years. The new organic standards provide a national definition for the term "organic." These standards detail the methods, practices and substances that can be used in producing and handling organic crops and livestock, as well as processed products.

Effective Oct. 21 this year, agricultural products labeled organic must originate from farms or handling operations certified by a state or private agency accredited by USDA. Farms that gross less than \$5,000 in direct sales of organic agricultural products per year are exempt from certification.

Organic farming and processing continues to increase in Washington. In 2001, the state's organic producers generated \$47 million in sales from 40,000 acres. (In 1993, only 6,200 acres were certified organic.) There are about 750 certified organic producers, handlers and processors in the state, producing organic fruits, vegetables, grains, herbs, and many other commodities and food products.

For more information about the state's Organic Food Program, visit the department's Web site at

<http://www.wa.gov/agr/fsah/organic/ofp.htm>.

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